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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP AND DRL  
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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KIF](#) [KISL](#) [SOCI](#) [CASC](#) [CH](#) [PK](#) [SA](#)  
SUBJECT: XINJIANG: AMCIT REPORTS HAJJ RESTRICTIONS,  
MISSIONARY EXPULSIONS, HARASSMENT OF EMPLOYEES

REF: BEIJING 4237

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor  
Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary  
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¶1. (C) Chinese authorities have increased restrictions on Xinjiang's Uighur population by collecting Uighurs' passports to prevent unauthorized Hajj travel, according to an American citizen businessman in Xinjiang and other Embassy contacts. A low-ranking PLA officer reportedly told the businessman that 2,000 Muslim Uighurs were detained in southern Xinjiang for "illegal religious activities." The businessman also reported that recent expulsions of foreign missionaries may have been in response to complaints from local Muslim leaders about the growth of Christianity at a time when Muslims face significant restrictions. Three of his current and former employees, all of whom are Christian, have been harassed by Chinese authorities, though he believed the harassment had more to do with their work for an "American" company rather than their religious beliefs. Separately, a Uighur contact in northwest Xinjiang Prefecture related word of a rise in arrest of Uighurs in that area, with local cadres supposedly emphasizing the need to maintain stability in advance of the Olympics. End Summary.

Restrictions on "Unsanctioned" Hajj Pilgrimages  
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¶2. (C) In a July 20 meeting with Poloffs, American citizen businessman, warden and long-time Xinjiang resident Steve Brannon (strictly protect) discussed reports of increased Chinese restrictions designed to prevent Uighur Muslims from traveling on "unsanctioned" Hajj pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia. According to Brannon, passport-holding Uighurs have been told to turn their passports into local Public Security Bureau (PSB) offices or risk having them canceled altogether. Some Uighurs attempting to leave China overland find out that their passports have been canceled and are turned back by border guards.

¶3. (C) Brannon's comments track closely with a June 27 Radio Free Asia (RFA) report that Xinjiang authorities were collecting Uighurs' passports. A Chinese official quoted by RFA suggested the mass collection was designed to prevent Uighurs from going on the Hajj without Government approval. Since the 1980s, large numbers of Chinese Uighurs have traveled overland to Islamabad, Pakistan, to obtain visas for the Hajj from the Saudi Embassy there. According to a South China Morning Post article from October 24, 2006, over 5,000 Uighurs sought visas at the Saudi Embassy in Islamabad in ¶2006. Some apparently were issued visas but only after weeks

of protests and a Saudi decision that this would be the "last time" such visas would be issued. The article goes on to say that the Chinese and Saudi governments supposedly agreed in May 2006 that all PRC passport holders who travel on the Hajj must go through the official Chinese Patriotic Islamic Association, instead of a third country.

¶4. (C) In a separate conversation on July 23, Abdul Rayim (strictly protect), a Uighur currency trader at the Horgos Pass on the China-Kazakhstan border, told Poloff that these passport restrictions were in effect in Yining City, Yili Prefecture, in the northwest of Xinjiang. Rayim said he heard authorities are applying the policy in all of Xinjiang.

Once the PSB has collected a passport, police will only return it if the bearer can put up a deposit of up to RMB 30,000 (USD 4,000), Rayim stated, which is more than double the amount of cash a would-be pilgrim would need to make the Hajj.

#### Xinjiang Press Campaign

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¶5. (U) A review of the Xinjiang press over the past month reveals that the province's official media ran a number of articles warning against illegal pilgrimages. For example, in a July 11 article from the official Xinjiang Ribao (Xinjiang Daily), the Xinjiang Autonomous Region Chairman Ismail Tiliwaldi emphasized the need to prevent unsanctioned Hajj travel and called upon employers, customs and border guards to prevent such activity.

¶6. (C) In a July 16 conversation, Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences scholar and member of the Xinjiang People's Political Consultative Conference Ehmetjan Hesin (strictly

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protect) told Poloff that the Government recently held mandatory "training" courses for those suspected of having previously gone on the Hajj so as to warn them not to make any future unauthorized pilgrimages.

#### Unauthorized Hajj Cheaper, Free of Minders

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¶7. (C) A range of Embassy contacts have suggested that many Uighurs choose to take unsanctioned Hajj pilgrimages overland so as to both save money and avoid government scrutiny. While the official Islamic Association of China (IAC) organizes charter flights that are supposedly free of charge for Chinese Muslims, Post contacts say these official IAC charters are actually quite expensive. For example, both Brannon and a Uighur contact from Hotan, Abdul Raheem (strictly protect), told Poloff that aside from saving money, Uighur pilgrims want to avoid official supervision out of fear that participation in the Hajj would adversely affect the careers of relatives who hold government jobs. Brannon separately commented that many "unauthorized" pilgrims use the Hajj as a business opportunity, purchasing religious goods in Mecca to sell in Xinjiang, an activity which IAC minders likely would restrict.

#### Rumors of Mass Detentions in Hotan, Yili

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¶8. (C) Brannon told Poloffs that one of his customers, a low-ranking PLA officer, reported that 2,000 Muslim Uighurs had been detained in Moyu (also known as Karakash), in Hotan County, for "illegal religious activities." These detentions may be the result of a new policy in Hotan to give cash rewards for citizens who report "illegal religious activities" to police, Brannon surmised. Abdul Rayim likewise separately reported an increase in arrests, commenting that those recently arrested include participants in the 1997 "February 5" Yili riots, many of whom had already served prison time in connection with the incident. He also said local cadres have been publicly emphasizing the

connection between the approaching Olympics and the need to maintain stability in Xinjiang. (Note: Hotan and Yili are historically sensitive areas that both witnessed major incidents of Uighur unrest in 1995 and 1997, respectively. According to a January 2007 report in the Nanfang Zhoumou (Southern Weekend) newspaper, Moyu was the site of a secret meetin of "East Turkestan" separatists in 1994, after which the movement gained momentum and began to establish greater contact with forces outside Xinjiang.)

#### Muslim Discontent over Christian Missionaries

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¶9. (C) According to Brannon, there is currently a great deal of talk among Xinjiang-based expatriates about reports of expulsions of foreign missionaries this year (see reftel). (Note: In the same July 11 Xinjiang Ribao article mentioned in para 5 above, Xinjiang Chairman Tiliwaldi calls for strengthening "management" of Catholicism and Protestantism, in accordance with the law, so as to "strictly prevent" outside forces from using Christianity to "infiltrate and harm" the interests of the people. End note.) One reason for the expulsions, Brannon said, may be pressure from local Muslim leaders, who are upset over the spread of Christianity among ethnic Uighurs. Officially sanctioned Muslim clergy apparently have complained that, while authorities tightly limit Muslims to participation in officially sanctioned Islamic groups, they turn a blind eye to illegal Christian missionary activities. In a February 2007 meeting, Urumqi-based Protestant Pastor Fan Chenguang (strictly protect) related similar Chinese concern about Muslim perceptions of Christian activity, telling Poloff that PRC officials closely scrutinize her church's activities to avoid Muslim complaints of a double standard. Fan, whose church operates within the official Three Self Movement, told Poloff that the government asks that she keep various activities, such as her Sunday school program, extremely low key.

#### MSS Harassing Employees of U.S. Firm

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¶10. (C) Brannon complained that Chinese Ministry of State Security (MSS) personnel have been harassing three of his Uighur employees, all of whom are Christian, though he said he believes their connection to his "American" company, rather than their religious beliefs, is the primary reason they are under MSS scrutiny. Two former employees are

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regularly interrogated by Xinjiang MSS officials even though they left his company at least three years ago. One of the workers was arrested for three months in 2006, though the charges were "unclear." Authorities released the man after Brannon posted bail for him via an intermediary. In July 2007, the MSS turned its attention to Brannon's current employee, who has already endured three 12-hour interrogation sessions. Although required to appear as necessary for questioning, the employee is not under arrest or detention. Brannon noted that neither he nor his employees engage in proselytizing.

¶11. (C) The apparent reason for the unwanted attention, Brannon said, is MSS suspicion that his company is "spying" on behalf of the U.S. Government. His company, Pacific Research Development, runs two plum farms in Lop County, Hotan, and Yensigar County, Kashgar. The location of his Hotan farm along the flight path to a military airfield apparently reinforces this mistaken belief. For now, Brannon said he does not want the Embassy to become involved in the case, though he wants the U.S. Government to be aware of the situation. Although the safety of his employees is his first priority, Brannon said he is also concerned about the effect the "pressure" applied by the MSS could have on his company's development. For example, Brannon was frustrated that the MSS had interviewed a group of university students who had

interned at his company, thereby scaring away potential new employees.  
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